P I T T A

Bulletin of the Birdwatcher's Society
of Andhra Pradesh
HYDERABAD

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EDITORIAL

In a meeting of the executive committee, held on 14th October 1987, it was proposed that the BSAP bring out a monthly bulletin to inform members of the next month's programme and report important bird-news on time. The committee decided to call this bulletin, 'PITTA' as this is a word which has come into ornithology, from the Telugu 'pitta', meaning a small bird, latinized by Vieillot in 1816 (Analyse, p. 42) as the name of a genus, and since adopted by English ornithologists as the general name for a group of birds, called by the French 'Breves', and remarkable for their great beauty. In ornithology the word is first found as part of the native name, "Ponnunky pitta," of a bird, given in 1713 by Petiver, in the "mantissa" to John Ray's (1628-1705) SYNOPSIS (p. 195), on the authority of one Edward Buckley of Fort St. George, Madras city. This was the first attempt to catalogue the birds of any part of the British possessions in India. This bird is the 'Pitta bengalensis' of modern ornithologists, and is said by Jerdon in BIRDS OF INDIA, i. 503, to bear the Telugu name of "Pona-inki". [Eds:- This above information is from the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th edition, 1911. (notwithstanding many a dig at the editor's name!)].

The BSAP's newsletter, MAYURA, will be published twice a year, in July and December, from 1988.

PROGRAMME FOR JANUARY 1988

1) INDOOR MEETING :- 18th : Film Show.

Venue:- The CCF's office opposite the Rserve Bank of India, Saifabad, Hyderabad, at 6.00 p.m.

2) FIELD TRIPS :- We meet in front of Kamat Hotel in Koti, at 7.00 a.m. Transport will be arranged by the Society and the AP Forest Department.

i) 10th : HIMAYAT SAGAR.

This will be a half day trip and members can expect to be back by 1.00 p.m. Himayat Sagar is one of the two reservoirs constructed on the Musi river, a tributary of the Krishna, to provide drinking water to the residents of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. Earlier visits have resulted in such interesting sightings as Large Cormorant, Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill and Rufousbellied Babbler.

ii) 24th : ICRISAT Complex in Patancheru, Medak District.

This is one of the best birding spots around Hyderabad where one can list upto a 100 birds on a single day in the winter! Barheaded Geese, Pied Harrier, Redheaded Merlin, Grey Plovers, Ruffs and many species of duck have been seen in the past. Participants are advised to bring light snacks.

NEWS

* The Jerdon's Courser was among the most endangered birds of the world until rediscovered in mid January 1986 by Bharat Bhushan.

Working under the aegis of the Endangered Species Project of the Bombay Natural History Society, Bharat was assisted in his discovery by a village herdsman, Aitanna. On 3/12/1987 members of the BSAP were treated to an audio-visual programme on the Jerdon's Courser by Bharat Bhushan. None who were present in that meeting can forget the male Jerdon's Courser seated beside a stone, sunlight glinting in his endangered eye! According to Bharat, the key to the continued survival of this bird is the protection of its habitat. All his sightings of the bird have been within the narrow strip of scrub along the foothills of the Lankamalai range. Neither up the hill slopes, nor away from them, on the plains. This is the habitat and country where Jerdon had seen the bird in the 1840s. Blanford collected a bird from near Bhadrachalam town in 1871 but according to Bharat, today's Bhadrachalam has expanded so much that scrub jungle around the town has almost completely disappeared. Since his first sighting, he has seen the birds 8 times. The Telugu Ganga Canal threatened to cut right through the reserve forest area where Aitanna picked up the bird, till its alignment was changed. Now it will pass just outside the RF. Will the birds withstand the disturbance of construction teams? How many birds are there actually? Bharat feels ringing them is the only way to find out.

* Asian Waterfowl Census:- Last year, the first ever Asian Waterfowl Census was conducted by the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau. In India they were assisted by the Bombay Natural History Society, represented by Dr. S. A. Hussain and the Ecological Society, represented by Mr Prakash Gole, both of whom are the national coordinators for the country. In Andhra Pradesh, 12 waterbodies were covered. The largest concentrations of duck were those of Pintails and Spotbills at Pocharam, numbering 1405 and 1190 respectively. Other interesting sightings were of Indian Reef Heron (1 at Bhimasinghi), Large Whistling Teal (2 at Bhimasinghi) and Curlew-Sandpiper (18 at Kondakarla).

This winter (1987-88) the Waterfowl Census will be held on the 10th of January throughout India. Interested members may please collect forms from Mr Aasheesh Pittie, 14-7-370 Begum Bazar, Hyderabad - 500 012.

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